United Nations E/AC.51/2015/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 March 2015

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Fifty-fifth session
Substantive session, 1-26 June 2015
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council and a regional arm of the United Nations. It currently serves 53 member States and nine associate members, covering a region that is home to 4.1 billion people, more than 60 per cent of the world's population.

While changes in the Asia-Pacific region are responsible for much of the global progress against the Millennium Development Goals, totals and averages mask significant variations between subregions and individual countries. Forty per cent of the population in the region subsists on less than $2 a day. Many countries in the region also lag in such areas as hunger, health and sanitation and face challenges that include rising inequality, unplanned urbanization and vulnerabilities associated with being the most disaster-prone region in the world.

In line with the ESCAP mandate to promote regional cooperation and action for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development, the ESCAP secretariat has supported relevant member State dialogue and policy work on development issues. Member State interviewees and survey respondents cited examples of useful consensus-building and norm-setting work related to transportation connectivity, social development and environmental issues.

* E/AC.51/2015/1.

15-04335 (E) 060415

Please recycle

At the same time, the lack of a strong ESCAP secretariat corporate framework to support joint planning has led to inefficiencies in the implementation of research and analysis and other work. Coordination has sometimes been insufficient to achieve the strategic goal of ESCAP to promote a multidisciplinary perspective and target its limited resources towards activities where regional cooperation is most critical. In addition, monitoring and evaluation data on the utilization of ESCAP research and analysis and other outputs are inadequate to assess programme effectiveness. Nevertheless, data from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) indicate user satisfaction with ESCAP publications, including the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, the *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific* and the *Asia-Pacific Regional Millennium Development Goals Report*, which were rated useful by the highest proportion of stakeholders and considered very authoritative in addressing economic and social development issues in the region.

The ESCAP network of subregional offices (apart from the Pacific office) is a recent addition. While it will take time for those offices to evolve into their most meaningful corporate shape, it is already clear that they respond to an existing demand, given that in many cases the subregion is the most meaningful level for cross-border collaboration. Meanwhile, the priority that those offices should give to the corporate representational as opposed to the substantive role, as well as to the activities that will be undertaken at the division as opposed to the subregional office level, is left unclear.

OIOS makes four important recommendations related to:

(a) Action by the Executive Secretary on the recommendations of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee;

(b) Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of ESCAP research and analysis work, including more evaluations that extend beyond a single-project focus;

(c) Development and implementation of an ESCAP-wide outreach and common branding strategy for its outputs;

(d) Implementation of a framework that addresses the clarification of roles, responsibilities and authorities that relate to subregional offices.

Contents

		Page
I.	Introduction	4
II.	Background	4
	A. Mandate, governance, organization and resources	4
	B. Evaluation framework: scope and methodology	6
III.	Evaluation results	9
	A. Through its research and analysis work, ESCAP has supported member State intergovernmental dialogue on regional cooperation, as well as policy work on development issues	9
	B. Lack of a strong ESCAP corporate framework to support joint work planning has led to inefficiencies in the implementation of research and analysis and other ESCAP work	11
	C. Utilization of ESCAP research and analysis work appears to be largely unknown, limiting the ability of ESCAP to assess its overall effectiveness	12
	D. Effectiveness of ESCAP has been constrained by the lack of implementation and enforcement of its framework on the roles and responsibilities of subregional offices and divisions	17
IV.	Conclusion	22
V.	Recommendations	23
Annex		
	Executive Secretary's comments to the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	25

I. Introduction

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken early in 2013. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the evaluation for consideration at its fifty-fifth session, in 2015 (see A/68/16, para. 158). The General Assembly endorsed the selection in paragraph 6 of its resolution 68/20.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS evaluation is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8), which define the objective of evaluation as: (a) determining as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives; and (b) enabling the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing organizational effectiveness.[1] The evaluation was also prepared in conformity with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

II. Background

A. Mandate, governance, organization and resources

3. ESCAP was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council and the regional arm of the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific region. It currently serves 53 member States and nine associate members, covering an area stretching from Turkey in the west to Kiribati in the east and from the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south.[2]

4. The mandate of ESCAP is to promote regional cooperation and action for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific. It provides a forum for its member States on regional cooperation and assists them in building and sustaining shared economic growth and social equity. Moreover, ESCAP provides a platform for the participation of the least developed and landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

5. During the period of the evaluation, the work of ESCAP was guided by the strategic framework for the period 2012-2013 (A/65/6/Rev.1, programme 15). The ESCAP secretariat, which supports the Commission, including its eight sectoral committees, is located in Bangkok and is headed by an Executive Secretary. The ESCAP secretariat is composed of the Office of the Executive Secretary, seven substantive divisions, including five regional institutions,[3] four subregional offices, the Division of Administration and the Programme Planning and Partnerships Division. Their expected accomplishments and corresponding indicators of

[1] Regulation 7.1.

[2] Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolutions 37 (IV) and 414 (XIII).

[3] Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (Beijing); Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (Incheon, Republic of Korea); Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (New Delhi); Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (Bogor, Indonesia); and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (Chiba, Japan).

achievement are outlined in the strategic framework. The seven substantive divisions cover:

- Macroeconomic policy and inclusive development
- Trade and investment
- Transport
- Environment and development
- Information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction
- Social development
- Statistics

6. For the 2012-2013 biennium, ESCAP had a total of 539 staff members, of whom 32 worked in subregional offices.[4]

7. The work of the ESCAP secretariat falls into three broad categories:

- Research and analysis, including ESCAP publications
- Convening and consensus
- Technical cooperation[5]

8. The ESCAP secretariat undertakes numerous research and analysis activities in the context of its substantive areas of focus; the outputs of those activities are intended to support consensus-building and technical cooperation activities. Many ESCAP research and analysis activities culminate in publications. ESCAP recently designated the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* as its flagship publication. Other types of publications that ESCAP produces, some recurrently, include policy briefs, book series, journals, working papers, manuals and training materials.

9. For the biennium 2012-2013, ESCAP reported a total of 566 outputs and 2,888 work-months in the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System. Research and analysis comprised 237 outputs (42 per cent) and 905 work-months (32 per cent).[6] The recurrent and non-recurrent publications subset of research and analysis reported in the System comprised 47 outputs and 364 work-months. Not all publications, however, are reported in the System. As part of an initiative to review and overhaul its publications programme, ESCAP is currently engaged in clarifying its universe of publications.

10. Resources from the United Nations regular budget and extrabudgetary resources from donor contributions, the Development Account and the regional programme of technical cooperation support ESCAP work. According to the proposed programme

[4] A/66/6 (Sect. 19).

[5] ESCAP defines technical cooperation as encompassing policy advocacy, regional knowledge networking, training, advisory services and other forms of technical assistance aimed at strengthening the capacity of members to formulate and implement effective policies and programmes in a range of key development areas. See the note by the secretariat on the overview of technical cooperation activities and extrabudgetary contributions (E/ESCAP/69/17), para. 16.

[6] Output and work-month calculations are approximations, with the following functional categories identified as "research and analysis": parliamentary documentation; recurrent publications; non-recurrent publications; and, within the "other substantive services" category, booklets, fact sheets, contributions to joint outputs and technical materials.

budget for the biennium 2014-2015 (A/68/6 (Sect. 19)), approximately 31 per cent of the total ESCAP budget comprised extrabudgetary resources. Table 1 provides funding and post information for the past four bienniums.

Table 1
ESCAP budget by type of funding and post
(Millions of United States dollars)

	Resources				*Posts*			
	2008-2009 (actual)	*2010-2011 (actual)*	*2012-2013 (estimate)*	*2014-2015 (estimate)*	*2008-2009 (actual)*	*2010-2011 (actual)*	*2012-2013 (estimate)*	*2014-2015 (estimate)*
Regular budget	91.4	100.5	103.3	110.8	440	440	436	420
Extrabudgetary	27.2	25.2	32.6	50.1	94	92	103	99
Total	**118.6**	**125.7**	**135.9**	**160.9**	**534**	**532**	**539**	**519**

Source: A/64/6 (Sect. 18), A/66/6 (Sect. 19) and A/68/6 (Sect. 19).

11. The top five bilateral donors to ESCAP are the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Russian Federation, China and Australia, which together provide 91 per cent of all bilateral extrabudgetary funding.[7]

B. Evaluation framework: scope and methodology

Scope

12. The evaluation addresses overall programme effectiveness. At the same time, in an attempt to maximize its usefulness, the following were identified as entry points from which to assess the wider evaluative questions of overall programme relevance, efficiency and effectiveness: (a) research and analysis work, including publications, of the ESCAP secretariat and linkages to related activities, such as technical cooperation work; and (b) roles and responsibilities of substantive divisions in Bangkok vis-à-vis ESCAP subregional offices.[8] Those areas of work are multifaceted and interlink with all other ESCAP activities and were determined to be of high strategic importance to the effectiveness of ESCAP on the basis of an analysis of its mandates and work programme, as well as consultations with ESCAP secretariat management and Commission member States. The evaluation was performed shortly after the expansion of the ESCAP subregional offices and the promulgation by the Executive Secretary of a framework on the working relations between subregional offices and substantive divisions in Bangkok (November 2012). In addition, in the context of Secretariat-wide reform efforts, the United Nations Headquarters-based Publication Board had identified the need for changes in research and analysis activities.

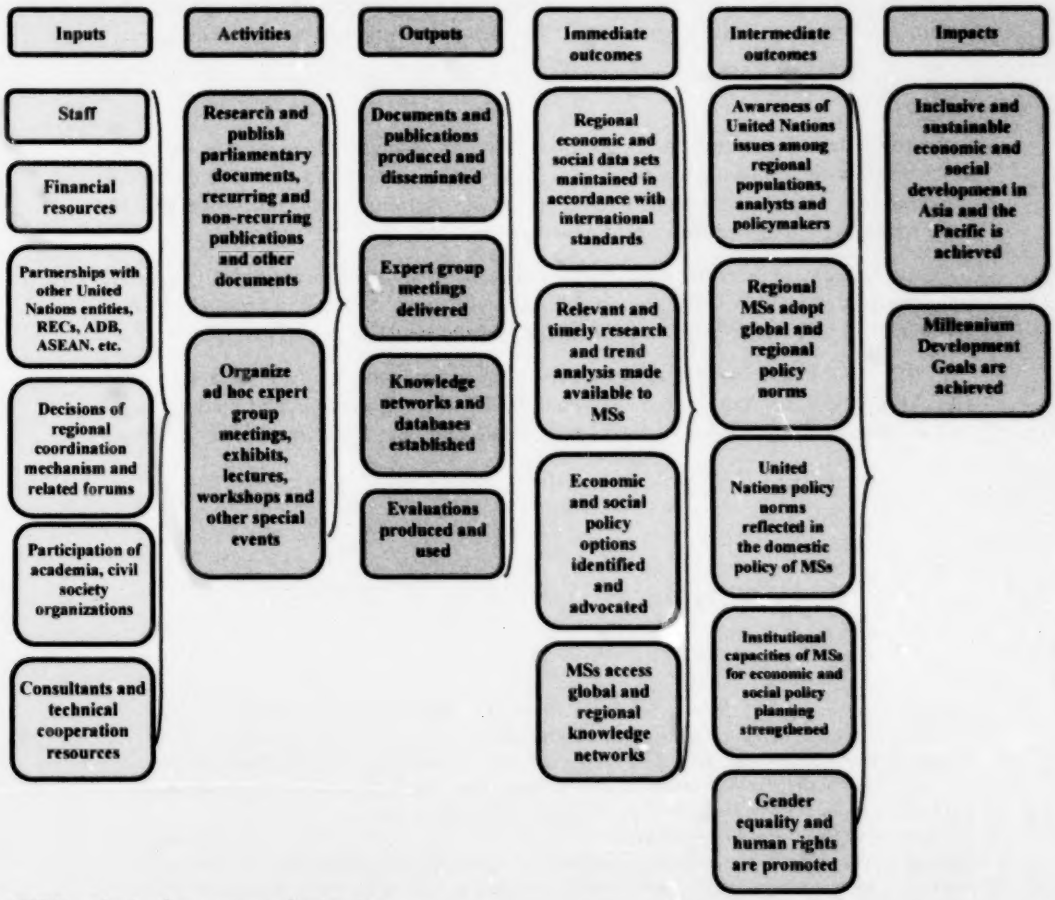
13. OIOS assessed the utility of research and analysis work across all subprogrammes, including subregional offices, to determine the degree to which that work met the needs of its intended beneficiaries. OIOS also sought to reconcile

[7] Document E/ESCAP/69/17, annex I. According to ESCAP, in 2012 the top five bilateral donors contributed approximately $8.9 million, which represented 91 per cent of all bilateral extrabudgetary funding.

[8] See para. 32 of the inception report of the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.

the degree to which that work aligned with the ESCAP strategic framework and performance indicators, including how research and analysis work contributed to building regional consensus. To facilitate the analyses, the evaluation team developed a "programme impact pathway" (see fig. I). The pathway is based on the expectations outlined in the strategic framework mandated by the General Assembly (see A/65/6/Rev.1, programme 15) and depicts the relationships between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes (expected accomplishments). It provides a lens with which to view how the research and analysis activities of ESCAP are interconnected with its other activities and their intended contribution to achieving inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in the region.

Figure I
Programme impact pathway for research and analysis work


Inputs
Activities
Outputs
Immediate outcomes
Intermediate outcomes
Impacts
Staff
Financial resources
Partnerships with other United Nations entities, RECs, ADB, ASEAN, etc.
Decisions of regional coordination mechanism and related forums
Participation of academia, civil society organizations
Consultants and technical cooperation resources
Research and publish parliamentary documents, recurring and non-recurring publications and other documents
Organize ad hoc expert group meetings, exhibits, lectures, workshops and other special events
Documents and publications produced and disseminated
Expert group meetings delivered
Knowledge networks and databases established
Evaluations produced and used
Regional economic and social data sets maintained in accordance with international standards
Relevant and timely research and trend analysis made available to MSs
Economic and social policy options identified and advocated
MSs access global and regional knowledge networks
Awareness of United Nations issues among regional populations, analysts and policymakers
Regional MSs adopt global and regional policy norms
United Nations policy norms reflected in the domestic policy of MSs
Institutional capacities of MSs for economic and social policy planning strengthened
Gender equality and human rights are promoted
Inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific is achieved
Millennium Development Goals are achieved

Source: OIOS analysis of programme documents.
Note: Each column in the pathway represents a set of elements that collectively influence the attainment of change as the process moves in the direction of the desired impacts.
Abbreviations: ADB, Asian Development Bank; ASEAN, Association of Southeast Asian Nations; MSs, member States; RECs, regional economic communities.

Methodology

14. Data were collected between May and December 2013. OIOS would like to acknowledge as exemplary the good practice that ESCAP had put in place by establishing an internal reference group[9] to support the evaluation.

15. The evidence in the present evaluation report is derived from a triangulation of documentary, testimonial, observational and analytical sources collected through quantitative and qualitative methods, including:

(a) Review and analysis of documents and quantitative data, including mandates, budgets, workplans, guidelines, policies, manuals, performance reporting data, previous oversight reports, publication production cost data and ESCAP Commission resolutions;

(b) Stakeholder surveys: two self-administered, web-based surveys of 1,645 regional/subregional-level partners and 57 high-level member State representatives;[10]

(c) ESCAP staff survey administered to all 503 staff listed at the time of the survey;[11]

(d) Interviews and focus groups: 121 semi-structured, primarily in-person interviews with a purposive sample of ESCAP management and staff and a range of stakeholders from Government, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations;[12] and two focus groups with member States;

(e) Field missions for data collection and observation to ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok and to two subregional offices: South and South-West Asia (New Delhi) and North-East Asia (Incheon, Republic of Korea);

(f) Publication/analytical product utility assessment: analysis of a sample of ESCAP publications and related analytical products using a number of methods, such as a review of web-based publication usage data and "big data" from United Nations

[9] Composed of the Deputy Executive Secretary, the Chief of Staff, the Secretary of the Commission, the Director of the Programme Planning and Partnerships Division, the Deputy Secretary of the Commission and the Programme Officer responsible for evaluation and opportunities to meet with the ESCAP senior management team and the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission.

[10] The first survey was sent to a wide range of stakeholders across all thematic areas and included representatives at the ministerial level and from non-governmental organizations, regional coordination mechanisms and United Nations agencies, as well as Bangkok-based and subregional partners. OIOS developed the universe of respondents in consultation with ESCAP focal points. The survey yielded a 17 per cent response rate (283 of 1,645). The second was sent to a high-level representative of each ESCAP member State at the ambassadorial level and yielded only a 7 per cent response rate (4 of 57). Consequently, data from the second survey were not used in the present report.

[11] The staff survey yielded a 42 per cent response rate (213 of 503).

[12] 79 staff and 42 stakeholders.

Global Pulse; the sample included key subregional office and joint publications, as well as publications related to technical cooperation and advisory services.[13]

16. A limitation of the evaluation was the low stakeholder survey response rate; as a result, responses from one survey were not used. In order to mitigate against this data limitation, any inferences of general validity were made only if survey data were also corroborated by interviews and document reviews. All analyses were thus triangulated with data from multiple sources to strengthen the evaluation results. In addition to internal quality assurance protocols, an external advisory panel was engaged to review the draft report.

17. ESCAP management's comments to the draft report are contained in the annex to the present report.

III. Evaluation results

A. Through its research and analysis work, ESCAP has supported member State intergovernmental dialogue on regional cooperation, as well as policy work on development issues

18. As indicated in the strategic framework and the programme impact pathway (see para. 13), ESCAP seeks to make research and trend analyses available to member States so that regional policy norms will be adopted, thereby facilitating improved, and inclusive, economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region. Although ESCAP has limited quantitative data on stakeholder utilization of its analytical outputs, its work has promoted regional cooperation and norm setting.

ESCAP is recognized and used as a platform for inclusive international dialogue and consensus building

19. Eighty-four per cent of ESCAP member State interviewees (16 of 19) told OIOS that the research and analytical work of ESCAP promoted useful intergovernmental dialogue. Stakeholder survey respondents also indicated that ESCAP outputs had been regularly used in the context of the regional consensus-building platforms that they had attended, as well as in their development work at the national and subregional levels. Specifically, the research and analytical outputs of ESCAP were used: (a) as guidance documents for development-related activities (52 per cent); (b) as a means to gain access to regional and subregional knowledge networks (48 per cent); and (c) to assist with national policy work (47 per cent).

[13] The sample included the following publications: theme study for the sixty-eighth session (2012), theme study for the sixty-ninth session (2013), *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, *Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report*, *Green Growth, Resources and Resilience: Environmental Sustainability in Asia and the Pacific (2012)*, *Asia-Pacific Regional Millennium Development Goals Report*, Monograph Series on Trade and Investment, Monograph Series on Transport, *Green Economy in a Blue World: Pacific Perspectives 2012*, *Review of Developments in Transport in Asia and the Pacific*, *South and South-West Asia Development Monitor*, *South and South-West Asia Development Report*, *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific* and *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*.

ESCAP research and analysis work has promoted regional cooperation and norm setting

20. The work of ESCAP on regional transportation connectivity was a positive example cited by more than one third of member State interviewees (7 of 19). Specifically, they pointed to its recent work in support of an international agreement on dry ports with its potential to facilitate regional trade and increase investment in inland areas. At the sixty-ninth session, held in May 2013, ESCAP member States adopted the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports, building on a long-standing body of ESCAP work. ESCAP analysis in the Monograph Series on Facilitation of International Road Transport in Asia and the Pacific (2011) was cited as an example of useful supporting analytical work.

21. In addition to ambassadors based in Bangkok, country-level officials cited the usefulness of the regional cooperation work of ESCAP related to transportation connectivity. Some pointed out that regional cooperation initiatives on transportation connectivity based at ESCAP headquarters were complemented by, for example, ESCAP work on South/South-West Asia subregional cooperation on two proposed corridors to strengthen connectivity, namely the Turkey-Islamic Republic of Iran-Pakistan-India-Bangladesh-Myanmar road corridor and the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad-Delhi-Kolkata-Dhaka container train corridor.

22. Another example of ESCAP work that promoted intergovernmental dialogue and regional cooperation is in social development. ESCAP undertook analyses to determine the situation of persons with disabilities and to develop a database of evidence supporting the formulation of regional norms. That work contributed to the Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, which includes a set of regionally agreed, disability-inclusive development goals with corresponding time-bound targets.

23. Furthermore, the analytical work of ESCAP on environment and development has contributed to the preparation of a series of regional reports. For example, ESCAP analytical work contributed to the adoption of the Astana Green Bridge Initiative, which was subsequently included in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want" (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex).

ESCAP work is most relevant when it targets areas in which regional cooperation is critical for success and integrates social and economic issues

24. Stakeholders reported that ESCAP was most effective when its work targeted issues in which regional cooperation was critical for success. Stakeholder interviewees commented that ESCAP research and analysis work was particularly useful when it identified the regional integration challenges that existed and could guide work in terms of the policy focus to suggest at the national level. In addition, the stakeholders valued the analytical outputs of ESCAP because of their integrated presentation of social and economic issues, compared with the more narrowly framed analytical outputs of other institutions.

B. Lack of a strong ESCAP corporate framework to support joint work planning has led to inefficiencies in the implementation of research and analysis and other ESCAP work

25. As indicated in the strategic framework and the programme impact pathway, ESCAP seeks to provide member States with a variety of research and analytical outputs. Examples include knowledge databases, trend analyses, policy option papers and publications. To do this efficiently and effectively, ESCAP must perform its work in a strategic and internally coordinated manner.

Current joint planning and coordination are insufficient to achieve the strategic goal of ESCAP to promote a multidisciplinary perspective

26. ESCAP strategic documents emphasize its goal to support member States in developing policies that address development from a multidisciplinary perspective, integrating economic, social and sustainable development issues. For example, the strategic framework for 2012-2013 comprises an "integrated set of eight mutually supportive and interconnected subprogrammes, which are linked to the priorities of member States". ESCAP, however, has yet to institutionalize a plan for divisions to jointly plan, develop and disseminate its research and analysis work. ESCAP staff and stakeholders commented on the considerable potential to further strengthen multidisciplinary work and cited challenges of divisions working in silos, following independent workplans without a coherent ESCAP-wide message. Limited ESCAP interdivisional work has at times been output-driven, without ties to a wider corporate strategy. Moreover, some staff interviewees commented on a tendency to select research and analysis work at the request of donors, without sufficient thought being given to cross-fertilization between subprogrammes. Stronger executive leadership and exercise of authority towards more integrated planning and coordination of the subprogrammes are needed to achieve better cohesion.

27. The current lack of a coherent corporate strategy and planning framework has also led to inefficiencies in the production and dissemination by ESCAP of its research and analysis work. For example, ESCAP is challenged in its capacity to develop, edit, fact check and achieve consistent outputs because each division operates independently with its own data management, graphics and design ideas and quality assurance practices. Likewise, the ad hoc nature of publication launches was viewed critically by multiple key partners who indicated that stronger planning and consultation were needed.

ESCAP has not defined its strategic focus and workplan priorities sufficiently to maximize the value it adds

28. As discussed in the section on result A above, some of the research and analysis work of ESCAP has been valued by its stakeholders for promoting regional cooperation. However, in order to achieve greater impact, ESCAP needs a comprehensive framework that clearly specifies its work programme implementation priorities, contains details and explicitly states the intended linkages between functional areas and subprogrammes. While the strategic framework for 2012-2013 served as a basic overarching framework, it did not lay out a clear and detailed corporate strategic plan that prioritized ESCAP work. In addition, synergies between the research and analysis work of ESCAP and its technical cooperation work were not identified.

29. Several ESCAP stakeholders and staff also commented on the tendency of ESCAP to accept offers of project funding without consideration of a larger ESCAP-wide strategy. In instances where ESCAP engaged in national capacity development, some member States and other stakeholders asked how some activities fit in the role of ESCAP as a regional actor in terms of its comparative advantage in promoting regional cooperation vis-à-vis the capacity development work of other United Nations entities. Moreover, if, in the future, subregional offices were to engage in more capacity development activities, ESCAP would need to ensure their alignment with organization-wide priorities.

30. ESCAP realizes that this is an area in need of improvement. In 2011 and 2013, as part of its preparation of the strategic frameworks for the periods 2014-2015 and 2016-2017, respectively, ESCAP held a series of consultations on how to implement a programmatic approach. However, such steps have not yet resulted in the development of a corporate strategic framework.

C. Utilization of ESCAP research and analysis work appears to be largely unknown, limiting the ability of ESCAP to assess its overall effectiveness

31. Sufficient programme monitoring and evaluation data are critical ingredients to assess the degree to which intended outcomes are being achieved as outlined in the strategic framework and the programme impact pathway.

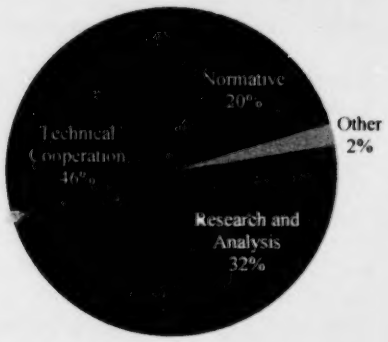
ESCAP monitoring and evaluation data for its research analysis function and other key functions are inadequate to assess programme effectiveness

32. The main source of ESCAP monitoring data consists of information collected from the Secretariat-wide Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System. However, as indicated in paragraph 9, not all research and analysis outputs or all publications are reported in the System. Over the past four bienniums, ESCAP reduced its recurrent publications reported in the System from 84 to 29 and its non-recurrent publications from 24 to 18, in line with a Secretariat-wide directive to streamline publications programmes.

33. Figures II and III show the breakdown of outputs and work-months reported in the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System. While research and analysis comprised the largest category of outputs tracked in the System, the data indicate that ESCAP spent more time on technical cooperation work.

Figure II
Outputs for 2012-2013

Figure III
Work-months for 2012-2013



Source: OIOS analysis based on data from the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System.

34. Of the 29 evaluation reports produced in 2010-2011 and 2012-2013, most were project-based evaluative reviews. Only one report cut across the subprogrammes, and the ESCAP research and analysis function received limited attention. The ESCAP Evaluation Unit manages evaluations and supports subprogrammes in conducting evaluative reviews. Earlier OIOS reports on the strength of evaluation functions of Secretariat entities reported that ESCAP spent 0.36 per cent of its total resources on evaluation and 3.15 per cent on monitoring and evaluation combined. Nevertheless, overall, ESCAP received higher scores than the majority of Secretariat programmes. ESCAP scores were negatively affected as a result of its evaluation function reporting to another management function; spending less than 1 per cent of its overall budget on evaluation; and not having an appropriate evaluation plan,[14] since the evaluation plan in place in 2012-2013 was not tied to a corporate strategy or needs assessment.

ESCAP maintains some records on its audience but lacks consistent tracking on the dissemination of its research and analysis outputs, limiting its ability to assess utilization and programme effectiveness

35. ESCAP reported that its publications targeted a broad audience that included member States, policymakers, think tanks, United Nations entities, academics and the general public. Some divisions track some recipient information and distribute readership surveys. However, no ESCAP-wide systematic process is in place to monitor the information, and the existing readership surveys struggle to get adequate response rates.

36. Currently, the majority of ESCAP publications are available both online and in print. The ESCAP programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 indicates a plan to increase online-only publications from 3 in 2010-2011 to 14 in 2014-2015. However,

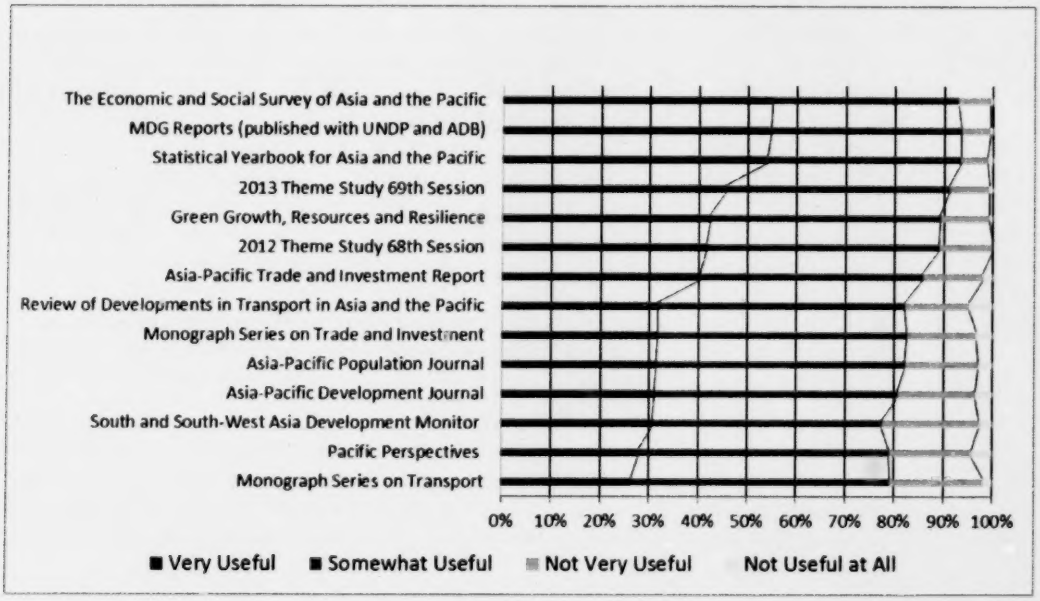
[14] Report of OIOS on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives (A/68/70) and report of the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division on United Nations Secretariat evaluation scorecards, 2010-2011 (December 2013, assignment No. IED-13-006).

at present ESCAP web tracking data are not a reliable source to determine website traffic or publication usage. Furthermore, geographical data on ESCAP website users are scarce, leaving ESCAP with almost no reliable information on the degree to which target audiences are being reached through that channel. ESCAP has indicated that an overhaul of its website and associated tools is currently under way.

Stakeholder data collected by OIOS provide some information on user satisfaction; however, an attempt to perform a cost-benefit analysis of research and analysis outputs, including publications, was limited by a lack of consistent ESCAP cost data

37. OIOS asked stakeholder survey respondents to rate the usefulness of a number of ESCAP key publications; the results are in figure IV below. The *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, the *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific* and the *Asia-Pacific Regional Millennium Development Goals Report* (published with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) were rated very useful by the highest proportion of stakeholders (55 per cent in each case), with another significant portion of stakeholders rating them somewhat useful. Respondents also considered them to be very authoritative in addressing economic and social development issues in the region.

Figure IV
Stakeholder ratings on publication usage


The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific
MDG Reports (published with UNDP and ADB)
Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific
2013 Theme Study 69th Session
Green Growth, Resources and Resilience
2012 Theme Study 68th Session
Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report
Review of Developments in Transport in Asia and the Pacific
Monograph Series on Trade and Investment
Asia-Pacific Population Journal
Asia-Pacific Development Journal
South and South-West Asia Development Monitor
Pacific Perspectives
Monograph Series on Transport
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Very Useful
Somewhat Useful
Not Very Useful
Not Useful at All

Source: OIOS stakeholder survey of regional/subregional partners.

38. Because ESCAP was not systematically tracking monitoring data on the utilization and cost-effectiveness of its research and analytical outputs, OIOS requested ESCAP to provide quantitative data on cost, dissemination and utilization for a sample of 10 ESCAP publications. While ESCAP cooperated fully in providing the publication data that it had at the division level, available data proved too

inconsistent for OIOS to perform a credible cost-benefit analysis of key publications. Without a centralized data depository or enforced standards, ESCAP cost data have been maintained inconsistently and production cost calculation methods varied significantly.

39. In search of additional quantitative data on ESCAP effectiveness, OIOS partnered with United Nations Global Pulse, which explores innovative methods and frameworks for combining new types of digital data with traditional indicators. United Nations Global Pulse measured online signals for ESCAP as an entity and for a number of its key publications.[15] In particular, social media and online news organization mentions were analysed in an effort to gain additional information on the breadth of the online reach of ESCAP, the type and location of its audience, and whether there were any press or social media "influencers" among those who mentioned ESCAP or its reports (see table 2).[16]

Table 2
United Nations Global Pulse comparison of social media profiles (August 2012-August 2013)

	Twitter followers	*Facebook followers*
ESCAP	18 888	2 677
Asian Development Bank	10 800	122 640
Economic Commission for Africa	3 389	526
African Development Bank	12 666	15 000

Source: United Nations Global Pulse, 2013.

40. United Nations Global Pulse indicated that ESCAP had a relatively large audience on Twitter compared with the African Development Bank, ADB and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Its Facebook page, however, had a limited number of followers.

41. With regard to a publication-based analysis of ESCAP effectiveness, United Nations Global Pulse determined that the 2013 edition of the ESCAP flagship publication, the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, was the only one with enough online signals for a marginally relevant analysis. United Nations Global Pulse found that mentions of the publication by online news organizations were spread across a wide geographical area.[17] However, the number was relatively low at 40; by comparison, the ECA publication *Economic Report on Africa* was mentioned 81 times. The number of mentions of the ESCAP report on Twitter was also low at 30. OIOS is providing the data gathered in the pilot analysis to ESCAP as it continues to

[15] OIOS used United Nations Global Pulse to better understand how analysis of digital "big data" could add value to existing monitoring and evaluation analysis and how better-targeted digital strategy could increase the reach of United Nations outputs.

[16] United Nations Global Pulse used Factiva and LexisNexis for news sources around the world in different languages; Topsy and Crimson Hexagon's ForSight platform to identify Twitter messages and analyse their content; and Topsy's and Google's specialized link functions and Yahoo and Bing to identify relevant links. United Nations Global Pulse defines social media "influencers" as people with a sizeable number of followers (at least 10,000) interested in the subject.

[17] *The Hindu* (India), Xinhua News Agency, Press Trust of India, Deutsche Welle Radio, Interfax-Kazakhstan, Kyodo News, *Dawn* (Pakistan), Thai News Service and *The Korea Herald*.

consider social media tools as a means to reach its audience and improve programme effectiveness. If ESCAP pursues this further, it will be important to do so with an organization-wide agreement as to the online audiences that ESCAP seeks to influence on a priority basis and the intended outcomes.

While ESCAP has taken an important step to increase its effectiveness by developing a plan to improve its publications programme, implementation is needed

42. ESCAP has insufficient institutional architecture in place to implement a strategic, integrated publications programme. Stakeholders consistently indicated that the ESCAP publications programme suffered from multiple shortcomings. For example, the development and dissemination of its analytical outputs need more coordination, both in the context of ESCAP work to support intergovernmental processes and in the context of its technical cooperation work.

43. In 2012, ESCAP management took the initiative to strengthen its publications programme through the establishment of the Research and Publications Committee. In May 2013, that Committee provided a report to the Executive Secretary on improving the quality, outreach and impact of the ESCAP publications programme. The proposed recommendations of that report are on target, addressing many of the existing risks and opportunities for improvement, including:

(a) Developing a longer-term research agenda that distinguishes itself from other organizations, with all publications guided by a multi-year research agenda;

(b) Establishing a permanent ESCAP Research and Publications Committee empowered to spearhead organization-wide strategic alignment between longer-term research agenda setting and the planning, production and dissemination of relevant publications;

(c) Developing and maintaining a department-wide list of all ESCAP publications. Subsequent to the establishment of that list, future development of publications could be reviewed with an eye towards mandates; opportunities for ESCAP to add unique value through a publication; and the Headquarters-based Publication Board's soon-to-be established directives to reduce publications by 30 per cent;

(d) Reallocating additional resource(s) to this work, if it is to be given the level of priority that it warrants;

(e) Incorporating, where appropriate, research activities into ESCAP capacity-building and technical cooperation programmes.

44. The ESCAP senior management team adopted the aforementioned and all other recommendations of the report on 11 June 2013. However, at the time of writing, implementation had not begun.

45. As the information throughout the present section indicates, ESCAP currently lacks important data on the effectiveness of its research and analysis outputs. In addition, at the time of writing, ESCAP was unable to provide the total universe of its research and analysis work. Effective decision-making (including work prioritization) is being hindered by lack of the following: (a) more effective coordination mechanisms; (b) more effective monitoring data; and (c) exercise of stronger executive authority. Without those, ESCAP is not in a good position to make informed decisions on work programme implementation that require trade-offs, such as those

needed to comply with the United Nations Publication Board requirement to prioritize research and analysis work in a manner that further reduces publication outputs.

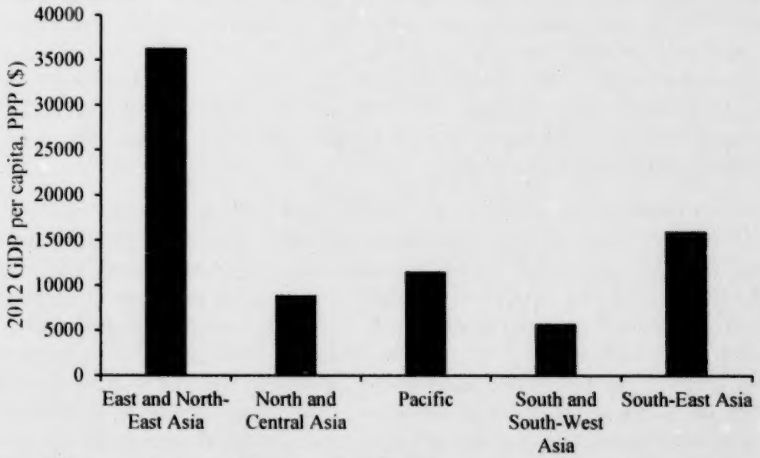
D. Effectiveness of ESCAP has been constrained by the lack of implementation and enforcement of its framework on the roles and responsibilities of subregional offices and divisions

46. The degree to which ESCAP can be effective in achieving the intended outcomes set out in the strategic framework and the programme impact pathway is closely related to its ability to align and coordinate the work of its subregional offices and divisions.

Subregional offices have been relevant in highlighting differences among and within the subregions' economic and social development priorities

47. The Asia-Pacific region is home to 4.1 billion people, more than 60 per cent of the world's population. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth in developing countries in the region (comprising 37 economies) was expected to expand by 5.6 per cent in 2014, up from an expected 5.2 per cent in 2013. At the same time, 2013 was marked by considerable slowdown in the domestic markets of India and Indonesia, two of the region's largest developing economies.[18] Subregions and countries in the region face different economic and social challenges (see fig. V for variation by subregion in GDP per capita in 2012).

Figure V
Average subregional GDP per capita, 2012
(Purchasing power parity (United States dollars))



Source: World development indicators, World Bank.
Note: Data not available for American Samoa, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, French Polynesia, Guam, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands and Tuvalu.

[18] *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 2013 Year-end Update* (Bangkok, 2013).

48. Similarly, in a region that includes 12 of the least developed countries, 12 landlocked developing countries and 16 small island developing States, the human development index rankings span a wide range, from very high to low human development.

49. The region as a whole has had considerable success with progress against the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in reducing levels of poverty, with the incidence of extreme poverty (below $1.25 a day) dropping, in the aggregate, from 52 per cent to 18 per cent between 1990 and 2011. Still, more than 900 million people live in "near poverty" (between $1.25 and $2 per day), a number that has increased since 1990, and about 40 per cent of the population subsists on less than $2 a day.[19] The region also lags in such areas as hunger, health and sanitation and faces rising inequality and unplanned urbanization, along with climate change and environmental pressures. Moreover, the region is the most disaster-prone region in the world.[20] Progress in achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals varies between the subregions and countries, with China, India, Papua New Guinea and the Russian Federation having a dominant influence on aggregates. The challenge for the region is to translate economic growth into inclusive and sustainable development and build economic and social resilience.

50. To more effectively meet its member States' needs, ESCAP has four subregional offices, with the Pacific office starting its operations in 1984. Prior to the establishment of the other offices, member States expressed the view that the ESCAP programme of work did not adequately balance the differing needs of the Commission's five subregions, and in the report of the Secretary-General on, inter alia, improving the effective and efficient delivery of the mandates of development-related activities (A/62/708) it was noted that the subregions (other than the Pacific) lacked similar offices as a base for the planning and delivery of programmes to respond to their specific priorities. Subsequently, the General Assembly, in its resolution 63/260 on development-related activities, established regular budget posts for three additional offices: East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia and South and South-West Asia, and strengthened the Pacific office. The East and North-East Asia office commenced operations in 2010 and the other two offices in 2011. Each subregional office's mandate covers programmatic work in substantive areas of priority to the respective subregions.

51. In the strategic framework for the period 2012-2013, the four respective subregional offices were to implement the activities under subprogramme 8, Subregional activities for development, for the Pacific, East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia and South and South-West Asia, and divisions in Bangkok, activities for the South-East Asia subregion. In 2012-2013, under subprogramme 8, 94 per cent of the outputs were implemented. ESCAP spent most of its time at the subregional level on field projects, and the Pacific and South and South-West Asia offices each produced a recurrent publication. Under component 5, Subregional activities for development in South-East Asia, no outputs or work-months were included (see figs. VI and VII).

---

[19] ADB, ESCAP and UNDP, *Asia-Pacific Aspirations: Perspectives for a Post-2015 Development Agenda* (Bangkok, 2013).

[20] Jerry Velasquez and others, *The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012: Reducing Vulnerability and Exposure to Disasters* (Bangkok, ESCAP and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2012).

Figure VI
Work-months for 2012-2013, subprogramme 8

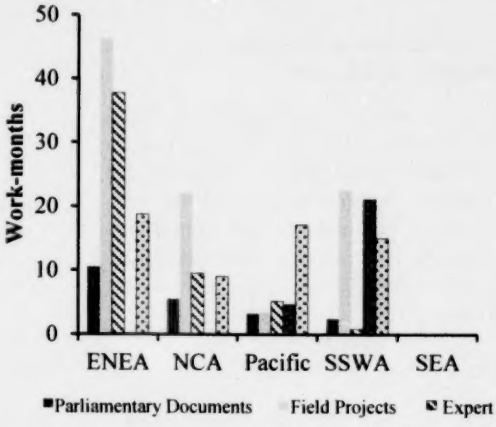
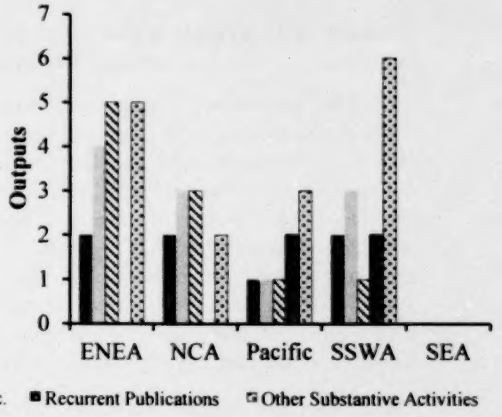


Figure VII
Outputs for 2012-2013, subprogramme 8



Source: OIOS analysis based on data from the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System. No resources recorded for South-East Asia.

Abbreviations: ENEA, East and North-East Asia; NCA, North and Central Asia; SEA, South-East Asia; SSWA, South and South-West Asia.

52. Some 90 per cent of stakeholders and 75 per cent of staff survey respondents agreed that subregional offices added value and brought ESCAP closer to the countries in the subregions. In addition to the logistical convenience associated with their physical locations, stakeholders remarked that the subregional offices supported member States in policy dialogues on subregional priorities, including presenting them at Commission sessions in Bangkok. For example, based on national assessments, the Pacific office has used its publication Gr*een Economy in a Blue World: Pacific Perspectives 2012* as a tool to support the integration of green economy policies into national planning and budgeting processes. The other offices have also used subregional needs assessments to prioritize their work and provide policy options to member States. Eighty-one per cent of stakeholders responded that the subregional offices' work had been effective in meeting their needs.

Divisions and subregional offices do not have a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities in substantive work

53. The subregional offices have been operating, collectively, for only a few years, and new structures and relationships take time to develop. At the same time, there is a need to identify, at this formative stage, what has worked well and areas for improvement. An earlier OIOS audit report on the governance and organizational structure of ESCAP and an evaluative review of the Pacific office conducted in November 2011 identified as a critical issue the need to clarify the roles, responsibilities and authority of subregional offices and divisions.

54. Staff interviewees and survey respondents remarked on the need to better define the roles and functions of subregional offices and divisions. Sixty-one per cent disagreed that the research and analysis roles and responsibilities of subregional offices and substantive divisions were clear. Likewise, inconsistent views were held on the role of subregional offices and divisions in capacity

development activities. Views varied between those who saw subregional offices as having their own work programmes and those who expected subregional offices to primarily support divisions.

Without implementation and enforcement of the framework on working relationships between subregional offices and divisions, risks exist

55. ESCAP senior management recognized that a lack of consensus on the subregional offices' role presented risks. In November 2012, the Executive Secretary issued a framework on the working relations between subregional offices and substantive divisions of ESCAP, which was updated in February 2013 in an implementation plan. Fifty-five per cent of staff survey respondents were familiar with the framework, while the remainder were not. In the framework, it was outlined that subregional offices would develop stand-alone knowledge products and lead specific subregional programmes or capacity development projects. However, it was also mentioned that subregional offices would collaborate with relevant substantive divisions in supporting subregional programmes and projects, as requested.

56. There have been instances where divisions and subregional offices took different positions on substantive issues, engaging in research and analysis and capacity development activities without coordination, which led to conflicting messages and inefficiencies. One example involved an office using draft data from a regional report that was to be issued jointly with a partner and proceeding on its own to publish a subregional report before the regional report was finalized. This confused ESCAP stakeholders and put a strain on the relationship between ESCAP and the partner. Many staff viewed divisions and subregional offices as competing rather than collaborating. Staff remarked on other examples where divisions and subregional offices gave "different", "incoherent" and "uncoordinated" messages. Member State interviewees also cited examples in which subregional offices and divisions gave differing information to member State representatives in the subregions and in Bangkok. Staff survey respondents and interviewees underscored that the framework needed to be implemented and enforced. In the last quarter of 2013, ESCAP began to hold planning and coordination meetings between divisions and subregional offices.

Resource and structural questions related to the engagement of subregional offices in substantive work remain

57. The strategic documents for subregional offices outline functions that go beyond representational or liaison offices. For example, the proposed road map for the establishment of the new subregional offices (E/ESCAP/65/20) and the November 2012 framework specify that subregional offices will engage in research and analysis and capacity development activities. Notwithstanding variation among the subregional offices, each of them has broad mandates, and the current staffing levels present challenges if they are to fulfil a significant substantive role in multiple programmatic and functional areas, as envisaged in ESCAP strategic documents. As stated previously in the present report, overall, subregional offices have received positive feedback; however, staff and stakeholder interviewees also remarked that the offices needed critical mass to engage in significant substantive work. The ESCAP subregional offices are small compared with those in other regions (see table 3 for budget and staff levels, by subregional office, for each regional commission).

Table 3
Budget and staff by regional commission and subregional office

Regional commission	*Budget (United States dollars)*	*Number of staff*
ESCAP[a]		
Pacific	2 793 800	9
East and North-East Asia	3 965 500	14
North and Central Asia	1 428 100	4
South and South-West Asia	1 852 100	5
Subtotal, subregional offices	**10 039 500**	**32**
Total, ESCAP	**135 888 800**	**539**
Percentage	**7**	**6**
ECA		
North Africa	5 820 400	23
West Africa	6 433 300	23
Central Africa	6 456 200	23
East Africa	6 309 600	26
Southern Africa	5 980 100	26
Subtotal, subregional offices	**30 999 600**	**121**
Total, ECA	**169 716 600**	**667**
Percentage	**18**	**18**
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)[b]		
Mexico and Central America	8 928 400	43
Caribbean	7 582 900	36
Subtotal, subregional offices	**16 511 300**	**79**
Total, ECLAC	**145 300 600**	**526**
Percentage	**11**	**15**

Source: A/66/6 (Sects. 18, 19 and 21).

Note: The proposed programme budget presents budget figures for subregional offices before recosting, while the budget figures for the regional commissions are estimates after recosting.

[a] Under Subregional activities for development in South-East Asia, $8,900 is included for non-post requirements. Staff in the respective subprogrammes based in Bangkok implement the work for the subregion.

[b] The figures do not include five national offices in Bogota, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Washington, D.C., with a total of 24 staff.

58. Questions also remain as to the placement of subregional offices in the organizational structure; this may be contributing to the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities. In 2012-2013, all subprogrammes reported to the Executive Secretary.

The proposed organization chart for 2014-2015, however, shows subregional offices and regional institutions reporting to a Deputy Executive Secretary for Programmes, while the divisions report to the Executive Secretary, eventually reinforcing the risk of ambiguity as to subregional offices' functions. Staff also remarked that having the Chief Economist of ESCAP concurrently serve as Director of a subregional office contributed to confusion with regard to roles and responsibilities, particularly when it came to regional and subregional economic research and analysis work. Finally, outstanding questions exist with regard to the implementation by Bangkok-based divisions of subregional activities for development in South-East Asia. In the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System, ESCAP noted as a challenge the fact that outputs for South-East Asia are implemented through the ESCAP main subprogrammes, which target results in the greater regional context.

IV. Conclusion

59. As member States and the United Nations system consider options for a "post-Millennium Development Goals" agenda, the opportunity may exist for ESCAP to play a bigger role in the United Nations architecture in supporting economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region. In order to do so, ESCAP needs to clarify its current role and improve its methods to assess effectiveness. Specifically, ESCAP needs to strategically identify the areas in which it can most effectively add value. This includes a need, at the corporate level, to prioritize the implementation of its work programme and discipline activities accordingly.

60. It hardly needs saying that the Asia-Pacific region is highly dynamic and diverse, with multiple forums for deliberating issues of shared concern for member States. The range and technical complexity of issues brought to the attention of ESCAP through member State debates and resolutions bring a need for action that exceeds the ESCAP secretariat's capacity. Articulating what ESCAP will do, what it will not commit its limited resources to, and how it will work with relevant partners are all key questions. ESCAP needs strong partnerships. As the United Nations moves into the future, there are a number of relevant questions that ESCAP needs to consider further, including how ESCAP will partner with United Nations funds and programmes in the context of their significantly expanded regional centres and long-standing emphasis on institutional capacity development work.

61. With regard to the research and analysis function, there is a need for that work to be more clearly anchored to the unique intergovernmental convening and norm-setting role of ESCAP. When it comes to implementing international agreements at the national level, the role of ESCAP should be limited to areas outlined in a prioritized implementation strategy. The fact that follow-up national action is needed should not, in itself, justify ESCAP involvement. Other actors may be better placed to deliver capacity development intended to strengthen institutions of individual countries.

62. Through the recent work of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee, the organization has taken an important step towards clarifying the process to prioritize, produce and disseminate its research and analysis work. This initiative is needed because ESCAP publication outputs are, in some key aspects, uncoordinated. Dissemination and outreach are often poorly planned and utility untracked. While an overall strategy has been developed, implementation has yet to begin. Follow-up in terms of monitoring and evaluation also needs to be vigorously pursued.

63. The network of subregional offices (apart from the Pacific office) is a recent addition. While it will inevitably take time for subregional offices to evolve into their most meaningful shape, it is already clear that their existence responds to an existing demand, given that in many cases the subregion is the most meaningful level for cross-border collaboration. Meanwhile, the priority that subregional offices should give to the representational as opposed to the substantive role is left unclear, which is exacerbated by the absence of an effective system for joint planning at the corporate level. Some instances of palpable conflict have therefore arisen between subregional offices and divisions in their activities.

64. ESCAP work has been used and is valued by member States in its support of intergovernmental dialogue, as a means of gaining access to regional and subregional knowledge networks and as a reference for national policy work. Changes at the executive leadership level bring a fresh opportunity to take stock and make adjustments that will strengthen the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of ESCAP research and analysis and related work in the ever-changing environment in which it seeks to make an impact.

V. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (evaluation result C)

65. The Executive Secretary should establish an action plan to implement recommendations from the Research and Publications Committee with concrete timelines and clear roles and responsibilities, giving emphasis to establishing a multi-year research agenda and a permanent research and publications committee. The research agenda should take into account joint planning, development and dissemination of research and analysis work between all divisions and subregional offices and linkages between the research and analysis work of ESCAP and its normative and technical cooperation work.

Recommendation 2 (evaluation results B and C)

66. ESCAP should improve monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis work, including publications, by establishing ESCAP-wide performance measures of such work and systematically measuring their cost-effectiveness, utilization and impact. Moreover, future self-evaluations should extend beyond single projects to include more subprogrammatic and thematic issues.

Recommendation 3 (evaluation result C)

67. ESCAP should develop and implement an ESCAP-wide outreach strategy for its research and analysis work that incorporates developing a database of all stakeholders, common branding elements for all publications and web pages, and dissemination for each type of work.

Recommendation 4 (evaluation result D)

68. The Executive Secretary should implement and enforce the November 2012 framework (after updating it, as applicable) on the working relations between subregional offices and divisions, which clarifies their respective roles, responsibilities and authority. As part of the framework's implementation, ESCAP should discuss the question of resource allocation as it relates to its expected accomplishments.

(*Signed*) Carman L. **Lapointe**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Annex

Executive Secretary's comments to the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific[a]

31 January 2015

Following my assumption of duties as Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in February 2014, I led a series of senior management team retreats to deliberate and reflect on the means to strengthen the effectiveness of ESCAP work, including its research and analysis. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) of ESCAP have greatly added weight to these deliberations and informed strategizing on ways forward.

In responding to the OIOS evaluation findings, and drawing from extensive discussions with the senior management team, I issued the guidance note on the strategic direction of ESCAP for 2015-2020 in November 2014.[b] The note clearly identifies the organizational work programme priorities in all areas, including research and analytical work, and defines key development results that ESCAP intends to achieve within the five-year period. It provides a basis for ensuring organizational focus and impact, as well as the effective alignment of institutional priorities and resources.

Furthermore, to strengthen the oversight and coherence of our research, analytical and publications work, in August 2014 I established a new strategic publications, communications and advocacy hub and assigned a staff at the D-1 level to lead the office. The new office is responsible for leading work on a new research and publications strategy and action plan, as well as for managing and coordinating the ESCAP multi-year research and publications agenda.

In line with the OIOS recommendations, I also created a new Research and Publications Committee to serve as a platform for the planning, development and dissemination of research and publications across ESCAP. The new strategic publications, communications and advocacy hub serves as the Committee's technical secretariat, with support from cross-divisional staff with strong research and analytical skills. The Committee will develop a multi-year, corporate research agenda, making recommendations for strengthening the quality, relevance and impact of ESCAP publications. Key strategies are being developed for improving the coordination of our publications, making our research work more targeted, and achieving a unified corporate identity for all our publications. This work will also be valuable for us as we identify performance monitoring and evaluation indicators for ESCAP research and analytical work to further enhance accountability and transparency.

Further institutional steps taken to strengthen programmatic oversight, prioritization and joint planning, as well as the alignment of resources to corporate

[a] In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services presents the full text of the comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. This practice has been instituted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

[b] The guidance note is on file with OIOS.

priorities, include the refocusing and reconfiguration of the ESCAP Programme Planning and Partnerships Division. The Division, to be renamed the Strategy and Programme Management Division, will also play a critical role in the implementation of the OIOS evaluation recommendations.

To further strengthen and clarify the collaboration between the ESCAP substantive divisions and subregional offices, in November 2014 I issued a new guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions.[b] This note takes into account lessons learned and supersedes the earlier framework on this subject. The new note provides further clarity with regard to the respective roles of and expectations for all organizational units within the ESCAP secretariat and contributes to organizational cohesiveness and focus. The Strategy and Programme Management Division has been tasked with putting in place a mechanism to ensure that substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions work on a common programme and reinforce each other.

In the context of the above-mentioned measures and actions, I wish to take this opportunity to formally indicate the acceptance by ESCAP of the recommendations of the OIOS evaluation and commit the secretariat to their full, effective and efficient implementation.

Finally, there remain some specific references in the final OIOS evaluation report on which we wish to indicate our views. These are summarized [below].

Section II.B, paragraph 12

We note that the first sentence, which indicates that "The evaluation addresses overall programme effectiveness", is broader than what was originally indicated in the scope of the evaluation. In this respect, paragraph 32 of the inception report of the programme evaluation of ESCAP dated 20 August 2013 stated that the evaluation focus would be on: (a) the research and analysis work of ESCAP; and (b) the roles and responsibilities of the ESCAP secretariat's substantive divisions in Bangkok vis-à-vis subregional offices, *with particular emphasis on the research and analysis function*. ESCAP would have appreciated notice of the broadening of the scope of the evaluation, which implies that a more wide-ranging examination of the ESCAP mandate and role was undertaken than was actually the case.

Evaluation result D, paragraph 57

ESCAP is of the view that this paragraph goes beyond the stated focus of the evaluation, as stated in the inception report of 20 August 2013, covering wider ESCAP governance, strategic management and resource issues. Furthermore, we find that statements in the paragraph such as *"... the current staffing levels present challenges if they are to fulfil a significant substantive role"* are at variance with the views of our member States.

According to the principal users of ESCAP services, namely the member States, the subregional offices have demonstrated their ability to deliver an effective programme of work in a range of development areas of priority concern to their respective subregions. Evidence of the above-mentioned position can be verified with the following documented statements by member States on the demonstrated capacity of the subregional offices to perform significant substantive roles:

- "The Commission expressed appreciation for the work of the ESCAP Pacific office and the support it had provided for members in the subregion, particularly its technical assistance and capacity-building activities in the areas of sustainable development, green growth and the integration of social, environmental and economic outcomes."[c]
- "The Commission noted that the subregional office [for East and North-East Asia] had successfully implemented programmes to support meeting the special needs of member States ..."[d]
- "The Commission noted that the subregional office for North and Central Asia had become fully operational within its first year and begun implementation of various activities related to subregion-specific development priorities."[e]
- "The Commission noted that the work of the subregional office for South and South-West Asia covered analytical undertakings, policy advocacy, technical assistance and capacity-building activities pertaining to inclusive growth and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, connectivity and regional economic integration, regional cooperation for food and energy security and disaster risk reduction, and implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Almaty Programme of Action for the subregion's least developed and landlocked developing countries".[f]

Evaluation result D, table 3

With respect to table 3, ESCAP is of the view that the information provided is misleading, as it does not take into account the differentiated roles, mandates and functions of the respective subregional offices.

(*Signed*) Shamshad **Akhtar**
Executive Secretary of ESCAP

[c] Annual report of ESCAP, 26 May 2011-23 May 2012 (E/2012/39), para. 233.
[d] Ibid., para. 219.
[e] Ibid., para. 226.
[f] Annual report of ESCAP, 24 May 2012-1 May 2013 (E/2013/39), para. 234.